

SANCTUARY ADVISORY COUNCIL



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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
U.S. Geological Survey
U.S. Navy

Artwork: David Sones

January 28, 2015

Dear Superintendent Bernthal:

At the January 23, 2015 Advisory Council meeting, Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary (OCNMS) Advisory Council (AC) passed a resolution, by consensus, supporting the Habitat Framework initiative of the Olympic Coast Intergovernmental Policy Council (IPC) and encouraging the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries (ONMS) and NOAA to support this important collaborative effort, including providing funding as available and expertise from NOAA staff to assist in its development, as requested by the IPC.

The Habitat Framework initiative is based on a need for a common understanding of all information sources regarding habitat and its role in supporting marine ecosystems. The Habitat Framework would serve as a comprehensive catalog to be used for supporting efforts to inform ecosystem-based management, identify and protect important habitats, enhance coastal and marine spatial planning, and other efforts to improve our understanding and protection of important marine resources.

The Habitat Framework will describe habitat in terms of density, productivity and use and indicates whether there is an absence of data and also build in other information sources. Using GIS, the information can be layered, allowing scientists and resource managers to understand what is known and what is not known. The Habitat Framework will use NOAA's Coastal Marine Ecological Classification System (CMECS) developed by the Federal Geographic Data Committee.

The potential benefits to the Olympic Coast are significant and align well with several OCNMS strategic priorities listed in the sanctuary's Management Plan related to action plans on habitat mapping and classification; populations, communities and ecosystems; and habitat protection.

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We support OCNMS involvement in developing the Habitat Framework, including the use of sanctuary data as one source to inform the product. This support comes with the understanding that the Habitat Framework products will be shared with partners and the public.

Based on these factors, OCNMS Advisory Council urges ONMS and other appropriate parts of NOAA to recognize the importance of such collaborative work, and to provide support, when possible. We also request that you distribute this letter to other appropriate divisions of NOAA that could be involved with supporting the development of the Habitat Framework

As the OCNMS AC, we represent a diverse group of constituencies that have a strong interest in sanctuary and marine resource management in the Olympic Coast region. Our role is to advise the OCNMS Superintendent on sanctuary management topics and concerns. We volunteer our time to assist OCNMS in maintaining a transparent, interdisciplinary, and comprehensive management structure for the sanctuary. The opinions and findings of this letter do not necessarily reflect the position of Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Lee N. Whitford". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "L" and "W".

Lee Whitford
Chair, Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council